

I am insulted by the extent to which the issue of media consolidation is being framed as one of consumer choice. I am a citizen, not merely a consumer, and I think media consolidation is fundamentally an issue of whether our electorate receives news of events, or merely propaganda in the interests of media oligopoly. My household was recently chosen to fill out television diaries for Nielsen. At the end of each diary was an area for comments. I enclosed the following as my comments:

We are very glad to have this rare opportunity to express our views about the state of American TV in a way to which its makers will truly listen. While we watch some entertainment programming, our viewing is heavily weighted toward news. Watching coverage of the war in Iraq on American Television, and then watching foreign media carried over CSPAN or reading coverage from non American web outlets has been an experience of cognitive whiplash. It has been like watching two entirely different wars. On American TV we've seen smiling kids shaking hands with American soldiers handing out food, whereas on the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's The National (hardly Al Jazeera), we've seen Iraqis driving away soldiers from the food distribution trucks and then rioting over the food.

On American TV we've seen Ted Koppel marveling over the virtues of being "embedded" and occasional images of Americans firing at something we couldn't see, while on Pakistani TV rebroadcast over CSPAN, we've seen GIs hammering on broken AlM1 tank tracks whilst being fired upon, and pictures of dead civilians in the streets.

I wish I could say that the coverage of the Iraq war was a momentary excess which will quickly pass, but such is far from the case.

When I hear the level of discourse on civil culture in our country, I am absolutely stunned by the ignorance commonly displayed. I cannot hold the populace blameless for their ignorance, but when I see what they are shown (and often more importantly, what they are NOT shown) on TV, I understand how the situation has become so grave.

As I write, Michael Powell's FCC is moving quietly toward approving yet a greater level of concentration in ownership of media in an already oligopolistic market. Apologists for such media oligopoly claim that the internet provides all the diversity of viewpoints we need. The ignorance of the American people (as demonstrated by polling, not just my casual observation) proves otherwise. Even public television gives us a "NewsHour" brought to us by Archer Daniels Midland, and SBC, and produced by a company 67% of which belongs to Liberty Media-- hardly what I would call public television. Freedom of the Press has been reduced to an advertising slogan used to sell us "news" produced by the wholly owned PR office of the General Electric Finance Corporation.

Since September 11, 2001, the word "patriotism" has come to be used in the American Media to describe a xenophobic, fear driven

intolerance that is anathema to the values on which our country was founded. The most profound threat to the America I was raised to love and cherish is not Dominique de Villepin, nor Saddam Hussein, nor even Al Qaeda-- it is the hijacking of the public discourse by a few wealthy corporations that are more committed to selling us the latest pharmaceuticals than to informing the electorate.